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ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership is one of the most important roles of supervisors. Supervisors lead other teachers in instruction to make them as effective as possible. They also lead teachers in developing and implementing an effective plan of instrution. The increasing complexity of teaching demands more help from supervisors and thus increases the complexity of the leadership role. Supervisors have to adapt to meet the needs of the people and the particular environment rather than practice a normative kind of leadership. Further, they must develop solutions for each individual problem as it arises rather than use "prefabricated" answers for any problem. Supervisors actively participate in the school's instructional program; for instance, they constantly evaluate the program and work with teachers so as to get the best results with students. Instructional leaders improve the quality of instruction by furthering professional growth for all teachers; in-servicing contributes toward accomplishing this end. Supervisors should be flexible enough to deal with any situation and should maintain a good relationship with their staff. For example, they should consider teacher input; help teachers to do their job; listen to and empathize with teachers concerning their problems; facilitate communications; and alleviate anxiety. The characteristics of good supervisors are originality, popularity, sociability, good judgment, good humor, cooperativeness, and the ability to inspire trust; however, the improvement of instruction is the first priority. Attached are 12 references. (RG)

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The Role of the Supervisor As An Instructional Leader

by

Jon N. Nebor

The role of the supervisor as an instructional leader is one of the most important roles a supervisor can play as a part of the school management team. This is because of the importance of supplying a useful and functional instructional program to the students. The school's main job, of course, is to educate, and if the teachers do not have a solid hierarchy of leadership to guide them, then the whole system of instruction can collapse for want of direction. This direction in instruction is precisely what the supervisor, in his role as instructional leader, is to provide. Supervisors are to spot the weaknesses in the instructional program and then act to correct those weaknesses. And when the supervisor and teacher can function as a team, both doing their best to make the quality of instruction the best that it can be, then it is the student and community that win because the students will be getting the best instructional program possible.

Definition of Terms

In this article it is important to understand a few critical terms. Webster has defined instruction to be the act of instructing; teaching. Webster has also defined a leader as one who leads or conducts, a guide. For the purposes of this assignment the two will be combined and an instructional leader

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will be a person who leads other teachers in the act of instructing and/or teachering. It will be a person who leads and directs the efforts of other teachers so as to make those other teachers as effective as possible in their efforts to teach their students. A supervisor will be defined as an official in charge of, and who has the authority over, the courses of study for a particular subject and of all the teachers of that subject. Therefore, the supervisor when acting as an instructional leader will be the person with the authority to lead and direct other teachers in preparing and implementing an effective plan of instruction.

Teaching Assignments Are More Complex Today

Carlson (1965) has stated that teaching assignments today are much more complex and demand infinitely more by way of responsibility, skill, and knowledge than did assignments of times past. Because teachers have so much added responsibility there is more pressure put on the supervisor to provide instructional assistance. This in turn expands the role of the instructional leader so as to provide an even greater need for him in the schools. Instructional leadership roles, then, are becoming much more complicated since teaching assignments are becoming much more complicated. The instructional leader must, then, be better prepared to handle these added responsibilities if he is going to continue to be a viable force in the school instructional setting.

Historically, the major source of instructional supervisors has been the teaching ranks (Carlson, 1965). Generally such promotions and transfers have taken place within the school system. The main reason for this has not just been the necessity of needing someone immediately, but of convenience as well. Teachers who have learned about instruction from the district where they presently teach would be well-versed in what that district needed and as a result, they would be in a much better position to supply that district's needs rather than someone who was not as familiar with the district.

Carlson states that classroom teachers and staff in a school system of whatever the size need support and stimulation. Their growth, competency, and vision need nourishment and their awareness of responsibility for change needs sharpening. This is precisely why there is a need for the supervisor as an instructional leader. The supervisor's role is to implement change for the better and he does this by seeing a need and then motivating his staff to fulfill that need. It is through his vision that growth takes place in a department and the school district as a whole moves forward.

Leadership Behavior Must Meet the Needs of the Group

Hersey and Blanchard (1977) emphasize that there is no normative style of leadership. Instead, they stress that successful leaders adapt their "leader" behavior to meet the needs of the

group and the particular environment. A successful instructional leader first determines the need of the people he is supervising, and then comes up with a plan to remedy that need. It is a tailored process developed specifically for the individual in need. The instructional leader, then, has no "clear-cut" or "prefabricated" answers that could be used for any problem. Instead, through his knowledge and expertise he is able to come up with a solution for each individual problem that arises.

The profession has constantly identified supervisors in education as instructional leaders. The presence and performance of educational supervisors does have a positive impact upon the effectiveness of teachers (Alfonso, Firth, and Neville, 1981). Supervisors promote better decision making by teachers, and that through their supervisory efforts curriculum study and articulation of the school's program are better accomplished. The role of the supervisor in regard to promoting effective instructional leadership requires intelligence, sensitivity, judgment, and skills. The supervisor translates organizational goals into classroom decision making and actions. The supervisor has to be a well-rounded person who can effectively interact in any situation. And when a program has an effective supervisor the end result is improved student behavior and/or learning.

Instructional Leaders Are Actively Involved

According to Tirrell and Jones (1985) effective instructional

leader are actively involved with their school's instructional program. A leader is effective only when the teacher is effective. This means that at no time do good instructional leaders rest. There is only one way to coast; downhill. Therefore, the effective instructional leader is always looking forward toward positive change. They are constantly evaluating the program and working with teachers so as to get the best results with students. This can be done in a variety of ways. A supervisor might start with an evaluation of the curriculum, or try to assist a teacher in his or her own teaching style, etc.... Whatever way the supervisor sees fit to help it is imperative that the planned change moves the instruction forward.

Instructional Leaders Promote Professional Growth

Instructional supervision has the chief purpose of improving the quality of instruction by promoting professional growth for all teachers (Barr, Burton, and Brueckner, 1947). In-service workshops can be very helpful here. This is because the supervisor can spot a weakness, or potential weakness, in his staff and then try to remedy the situation in one meeting. This is good for the teachers because they are supplied new knowledge in a nonthreatening way, and good for the supervisors because of approaching every single teacher, he can talk to several at the same time. The supervisor, thus, has more time to do other things.

Barr, Burton, and Brueckner further state that a dynamic leader will accept from all sources suggestions leading toward the initiation and development of curriculum programs. Leadership always assumes that change is the order of the day. After the supervisor identifies the need for a "change", he must develop an adequate process for achieving the desired changes. He must provide for:

1.) The growth of his personnel.

2.) That his staff have a desired type of security.

3.) That this new change provides for a continuity of effort by all concerned.

This is generally considered a complex undertaking on the part of the instructional leader so a functional organization must be developed by him so as to be able to carry out the desired effects. If these changes are haphazardly planned the desired effects simply will not occur. Therefore, it is imperative that every effort be made regarding wise planning so that the organization keeps moving forward. It cannot be stated enough, the ultimate responsibility of the supervisor is to keep his department and/or charges moving forward so the school system as a whole moves forward.

A supervisor influences teachers by his own example and tries to persuade them to identify themselves with his aims and methods. Teachers may usually defer to the supervisor decisions because of his potential authority and because his experience is similar to, but greater than their own. They usually will identify

with his aims and will follow his spontaneous intuitive responses in matters of policy. While the supervisor has the authority to lead and direct teachers, his right to dominate policy making cease and his leadership should rest upon rational influence rather than institutionalized supremacy. Besides working through the staff, the supervisor should also be expected to exert a direct influence on students. Thus, in addition to their contacts with the whole school, most stress the importance of knowing every child individually, and teaching classes regularly.

Instructional Leaders Should Be Flexible

The evidence is clear, there is no single, all-purpose leader behavior style that is effective in all situations (Hersey and Blanchard, 1977). Every supervisor must mold his own style of leadership while still being flexible and well-founded enough to be able to handle any situation that may arise. Problems usually do not happen in the same way everytime. They may be similar, but usually not identical. This is true also of a district, or even a department. As was stated earlier, change is the order of the day. And whether it be a new goal, or a new problem, the supervisor as the instructional leader has to be able to adapt so that the "right decision" is made and the instructional process in the school is enhanced, not put back.

Erickson (1977) has written that a school is in a constant state of change without anyone having to do anything to induce

or encourage the process. Several hundred people enter and leave a school a day. New problems, programs and personnel are introduced constantly in schools as pupils graduate.... The instructional leader constantly has variables changing on him and if he is not flexible in his decision making, and in how he handles problems, the school will not be going forward as it should.

Instructional Leaders Must Listen To Teacher Input

According to Cunningham (1971) it would appear that traditional instructional leadership images lack congruence with reality. Today more than ever there is a need to identify learning experiences which are relevant to success in running instructional programs. The authoritative type of supervisor is not going to get the same results as a democratic leader who consider's the teachers' imput in his decisions. Cunningham states that the supervisor should be the leader, advisor, and friend of the teachers. It is he who keeps all of the faculty moving in the same direction.

Cunningham further states that supervisors should share in the educational policy decisions with teachers. The teacher's role is changing today and they are starting to have more to say about policy and decisions. The instructional leader's attitude toward teacher participation must also change so as to listen more to what the teacher has to say. If the supervisor's attitude does not change, then the distance between the teacher and himself will

become greater and gr ater until the school is no longer going forward, but stopped or even backing up.

Redfern (1966) writes that the good instructional leader should do everything possible to maintain a favorable and accepting rapport with his staff. He maintains that this absolu tely critical to supplying the best possible instructional program within a school. Good management, sound insight, personal security, sensitivity, mature behavior, flexibility, and the opportunity for a teacher to find personal fulfillment through her work are all of the necessary ingredients that the instructional leader has to supply his staff. When all of this supplied, and the teachers feel good about what they are doing, then the teachers will be motivated to do their best teaching. Redfern asserts that the supervisor is getting the best results for his instructional program when he is motivating his staff so that the quality of teaching remains high. He asserts that most of the instructional leadership is behind the scenes, not always "in front of the crowd".

Instructional Leaders Assist and Support the Teacher

Lucio an McNeil (1962) state that the instructional leader's role is said to be that of creating an environment in which teachers can contribute their range of talents to accomplish the goals of the school. Supervisors should be approachable and show interest by visiting others in their place of work, encouraging new ideas that are related to practical situations, but appraise ideas before

action is instituted as well as during and after action. They assert that the teacher is not to be given a complete free hand, but encouraged to do her best, and then helped and assisted all along the way as the teacher does her job. The instructional leader does more than just set goals and provide leadership, he provides support so that the teacher has active assistance all along the way as she strives to improve her teaching.

Lucio and McNeil further maintain that in order to understand an individual's problems supervisors are encouraged to listen with patience and to try to put themselves in the position of the speaker. The successful instructional leader tries to smooth the path of human interaction, ease communication, evoke personal devotion, and allay anxiety. The instructional leader has the responsibility of defining the limits within his teachers must operate and for helping them. He is the driving force that keeps the whole "team" on track so that each person's highest potential is realized.

Characteristics of the Successful Instructional Leader

According to Jacobson, Lobsdon, and Wiegman (1978) instructional leaders may not expect loyalty and strict followership unless they involve teachers in planning instructional improvement and earn the position of leadership which their office allows them. Such personal characteristics as originality, popularity, socialability, good judgment, good humor, and cooperativeness tend to be related

to good leadership. If the instructional leader is going to have the loyalty of his staff he absolutely must be a person they trust and respect, otherwise, he will be ineffective and the goals of the school will not be furthered.

Jacobson, Lobsdon, and Wiegman further state that the most important role of the instructional leader is the improvement of instruction. They write that although one may be very social, popular, etc... the bottom line is that the instructional program has to be successful in educating the students. Sociability, popularity, etc... are only some of the tools the successful instructional leader uses to make his instructional program the best it can be. The instructional leader has to also be able to spot areas in need of improvement, and then act to correct them. The supervisor should realize that it is not always possibe to be a "good ole boy" and that sometimes in order to get the job done he may have to set his foot down and be less than charming. The improvement of instruction has to be the first consideration, not being popular. If the instructional leader confuses the two, and would rather be popular, then he is shirking in his responsibility

Conclusion

The role of the supervisor as an instructional leader has been carefully explored in this article. Since the instructional leader has one of the most important roles in the school, that of making sure the school's instructional program is the best it

can be, he must always be on the lookout for better ways of doing things. Even the simplist tasks can always be improved upon. He must be an energetic person who listens to the teachers he directs, as well as being organized and ready to assist on any problem. He must also be able to anticipate the school's needs even before a potential problem occurs. In short, the successful instructional leader is always there when needed by a teacher to help in any way he can. And when the instructional leader is successful in his efforts it is not just his own individual department that moves forward, but the entire school and school district.

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